The teacher went on to list keywords that had to be included in their answers to fetch the maximum points on the test.

"Nothing beside remains, round the decay of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare."

were slightly pursed, giving the impression of an old china doll. Skin pale and smooth. She stared back at him. Those eyes, piercing his mind like that of liquid chrome falling into water. Those eyes. He could never forget them. What was behind them, looking into them bridged their separate consciousness and joined them into one. There was no spoken thought, just the essence of their link. He didn't know how long they had stayed like that. Minutes, hours, maybe even weeks. Then it changed. Their perfect connection was severed. He knew he must touch her, feel that skin that looked so pure. Reaching up to her perfect beauty he realized his mistake the microsecond after he made it.

He had touched the black ICE, the ICE that kills. Instantly he was thrown wildly into the non-space. His virtual self being bounced back and forth between systems, nodes, data. The rush of information blurred his mind, not knowing where he was going, the dis-orientation finally got to him. He had woke up on the floor of his apartment. Lying in a dried pool of his vomit. Later, after his confusion had cleared and he remember who he was, he looked at his cyber-space deck. It was fried beyond repair. Circuits fused and plastics melted into a hulk of useless silicon.

The only data he was able to recover was his medical status during the run. He had stared at the ICE, at her, for almost two days. He was surprised that no one had done anything about it sooner, but he knew why. The face that he saw was the face of death. A measure implemented by the ICE to entice and trap any unlucky intruder. The deck showed that he had flat-lined. He was clinically dead for almost three minutes. Ever since that day his life was changed.

In his sleep he dreamed, dreamed of that face. It was always the same, her, looking at him through those eyes. The eyes were what made him never forget. Those eyes had haunted his every waking

Intro

Hi and hello again. With great gratitude and immense excitement, we present ^Z Issue. 2. One should probably preface this (at this point in time) that nothing within the zine is created by ChatGPT, or any AI software. Words are by and for real people. The Smol Web netizens, the members of the Tildeverse, everyone who has Web access (and who don't! Printable!)

With that out of the way, onto Issue. 2! Cyberpunk dystopias (or Utopias?), words of how the Web is changing, and it's the Smol Web that *is* that change, and many more.

We're glad you're here.

~loghead

Entries by:

ecliptik, ~nttp, ~chiptune ~gome

Outro

That wraps it! Issue. 2 of ^Z! Thank you thank you thank you to all who have contributed, and to all who *will* contribute! ^C members, Smol Web enthusiasts, and all creators abound enjoy submitting content to ^Z and I LOVE compiling each issue!

We hope everyone enjoyed reading, and the Web lives forever!

Until later..

~loghead and the ^C community

moment. There, looking at him from his reflection in the mirror. In the bar as he tried to drink them away. Everywhere. The only place that he didn't see them was in the cyber-space. He was almost always constantly jacked in. Only emerging to eat and sleep. Sometimes he went out to pick up supplies or to try and drink them away again. Aside from that, his life was the the quest for her. Through lines of data and millions of nodes he searched throughout the meshed one day into the next. He was convinced that he would find her again.

In his dream, he stood on the banks of a sparkling blue river. It flowed slowly and silently below the morning fog, taking the ashes of the dead to their spiritual resting place. He felt like he was waiting for something. He had visited the place before, but the scene had been different then, more "cluttered".

"There it is!" he exclaimed, to no one's attention, as large debris flowed before him in the river. The concrete mixed into the river and made it impure. He saw the millions upon millions of small pieces of plastic that got mixed into the ashes. The people around him started whispering,

Pity on those dead. They remain impure, even at the final gates.

The bombings had taken his parents and little sister. He had been away from home for something he had been forced not to remember, making the effort of recalling it all the more painful and meaningless.

It is in there, somewhere.

No.

The bombs had immediately vaporized those who stood in close proximity. There was no warm embrace to return to.

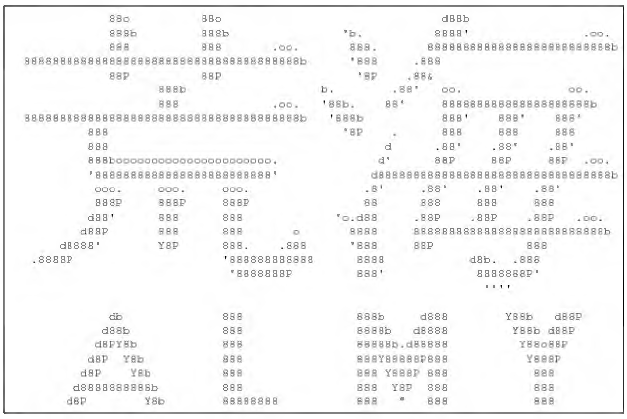
Half-aware of the classroom thanks to its ever-present, unoriginal atmosphere, he woke up with watery eyes. His head placed on folded arms, he clenched his teeth and swallowed to get rid of the lump in his throat.

It had only taken ten minutes for the towers of the mountain city of Naizo, his home, to be transformed into picturesque, grayscale ruins.

ASCII Art by *~gome* (continued…)

Almy

Name for my old Dell Optiplex 790, after it crapped out and I transferred its previous title, "Alsare", to another computer. It's the first machine I ran Linux on (Arch btw)! "Arumi" is Japanese for "rough sea". "Almy" is an alternative way of transliterating the word into English, which preserves the "Al-" naming convention I follow. The ASCII art for the kanji is original. The roman letters are based on Colossal by Jonathan (see Alsare's page), but I shortened the letters and made a modified symmetric version of the "A".



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Fish by *~chiptune*

What the machines do, what they think, is out of our reach, and perhaps forever will be. The machines can adapt exponentially faster than us. That is why we use them to solve all our problems nowadays. We don't have to be able to control them, we just have to be able to kill them off when the work is done. And yes, we use machines to develop those mechanisms, too.

The squadrons out there, patrolling the asteroids, would never think once about how each missile they fire, is conscious. It is the copy of the brain of a fish - one that thinks it is swimming towards food. Having been bred with unparalleled spatial awareness, and thousands of years of evolution in three-dimensional movement, it was a better solution than wasting time to train neural networks to do the same thing. Less capable militaries thought so, and so did we. The first version was released, and after that, billions upon billions of bio-digital copies of the poor creature's brain were embedded into our weapons. For each and every one of the thousands of missiles that are fired from the warships every standard day, that poor fish wakes up with a pre-programmed affinity towards its "food", and simply dies.

The professor used to go on and on about the finest details of technology. He considered it a privilege, for someone to know how things worked, especially when surrounded by levels of technological complexity that towered over their world.

After Computer Science, came Literature class.

"Look on my works, ye mighty, and Despair!", an excerpt from "Ozymandias", the ancient Sonnet by one Percy Bysshe Shelley - what does it bring to your mind? I will tell you what it should.

Notes on the small web by *~nttp*

Where by small web I mean all the things people are doing to claw back the 'net from corporations:

- hosting handmade sites on NeoCities;
- not to mention on Ichi;
- making digital collages on HotGlue;
- also on Multiverse;
- keeping personal wikis on Flounder;

and much more.

The small web doesn't have lofty principles. Nor does it reinvent the wheel. The small web simply aims to put the fun back into making websites, and pride into the old title of webmaster.

HTML is still good. CSS is still good. Even a little Javascript to spice up the page can't hurt now and then, in moderation. Want to follow updates? Drop by again sometimes — when you feel like it, not when I push updates to you. No worries, I'll mark what's new with a little GIF, or simply like this: new, or write a couple of lines about what's changed and when. Not that it's much harder to have a newsfeed. RSS remains useful too.

Even better, we on the small web are proud to be part of something bigger:

The small internet

The earliest social networks weren't on the web. Not even on CompuServe. They started in a big way with public access Unix servers, though even those had precedent, such as PLATO.

Silicon Pipe-Dream by *ecliptik*

Feburary 20th, 2003 ~ecliptik

He jacked in. It hit him every time differently. The swirls of colourful geometric shapes that were the matrix. Massive lines of data, flying past him as fast as his deck could handle. The vast non-space that was cyber-space. The infinite void that was oozing information, yet in reality was nothing more than electrons being switched on and off. He was one with the matrix. The world-wide network of computers which everyone and everything depended on. For years he had been jacking in, looking for something, looking for his silicon pipe-dream.

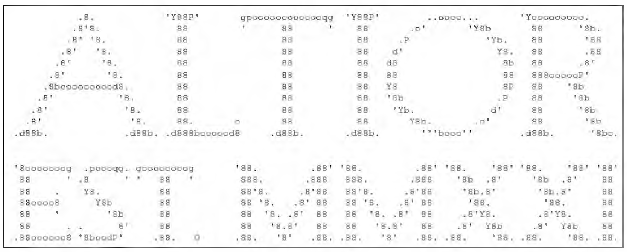
She had haunted him ever since he had cracked the ICE (Intrusion Counter-measure Electro-magnetics) of one of the largest corporations on the planet. The run looked like cake. Hired to infiltrate the company's mainframe and retrieve its most guarded secrets. He really didn't know what they were, nor did he care, but it was a job. A job that was the pivot point in his life. Getting past the perimeter ICE wasn't difficult at all. He used a few scripts that identified him as a court order and dove into the mainframes core data. Surrounding the core was black ICE. Not usual type of ICE which just detects intruders and alerts the authorities, but the deadly type. He had only encountered black ICE twice before, and both times he was lucky to get out alive. He had approached cautiously, trying to find a weak point. Moving in to get a closer look he could see his reflection. The shifting surface of the ICE made the image of his digitally-generated self look distorted and abnormal. Then his life changed.

His reflection slowly began to morph into that face. The face that had been haunting him ever since that day. The pale blue eyes that looked like the first ICE he had ever encountered and hair as black as the ICE that he was looking into now. The lips

ASCII Art by *~gome*

Altior

Name for my work computer. Latin for "higher" or "deeper". Serif font by me.



Those predecessors are largely gone, with Super Dimension Fortress as a notable exception. A new generation is rising as of late, a loose association known as the Tildeverse. And one thing people do on tilde servers, as they are known, is to make web pages like in the old days: a lesson in humility. But not just web pages!

Gopher was there before the web, and never went away. That's a good thing. We need alternatives more than ever. We've got another one, too.

For a while, Gemini was also an intriguing alternative, giving people new insights into what they had been doing for years. Flounder straddles Gemini and the web, for example, and it's not alone. Its shine has worn off in the meantime, but that's another story.

Then there's twtxt. It's microblogging done right (not just decentralized). Born on the web, but able to work equally well over any protocol. I used to think of it as low-tech newsfeeds, but its radical simplicity would make for a qualitative difference even if twtxt didn't have a killer feature.

Imagine if your RSS reader was also an RSS editor, and you could post updates to a web server somewhere while keeping up with friends or whatever. Social networking without accounts!

(Newsfeeds also work on all three protocols, by the way. Atom in particular is widely used in Geminispace, and Flounder used twtxt early on.)

There's still more. To my surprise, IRC is making a comeback (partly due to the aforementioned tilde servers). And e-mail never went anywhere, though younger people seem to think it's a kind of web service offered only by giant corporations.

Make no mistake, these corporations are at war with us. Given half a chance, they'll make it all but impossible for anyone to set up a website (or indeed any kind of online presence) unless they approve of it. To fight them, we need all of the above and more. Enough different things that the Big Five will never be done playing whack-a-mole if they try.

I know people trying to keep bulletin board systems alive. I know people trying to revive Bildschirmtext (that was the German equivalent to Minitel). I want to see all of them succeed.

I've been doing web development for over two decades now, and my work is only beginning.